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Preparing for Public Health Emergencies

Are you and your family prepared?

Are you prepared for a public health emergency? What would you do if your community was affected by a bioterrorism or chemical terrorism attack, or an infectious disease outbreak? Do you have a family disaster plan? Do you have a disaster supply kit? Do you know what to do if asked to evacuate or shelter-in-place?

Public health workers across the state are planning, training, exercising, and preparing for a response to public health emergencies in Alaska.

The Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Health and Human Services and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Division of Public Health, developed this supplement in coordination with many emergency preparedness partners statewide.

Here, you'll learn about how you can be prepared for public health and other emergencies and how various agencies and individuals work together to help keep Alaskans safe, healthy and prepared.



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Keeping Alaskans safe, healthy, and prepared.

Emergency Preparation Begins with a Disaster Supply Kit

Disasters and emergencies can strike at any time causing you and your family to have to evacuate your home or remain confined to your home for extended periods of time.

Often, during disasters, utility systems (electricity, gas, water, phone, etc) may be interrupted or unavailable for several days. State and local health and emergency management officials recommend having enough supplies on hand to sustain you and your family for at least five to seven days. Your disaster supply kit should contain the following:

Water: At least one gallon of water per person per day. (Remember to change out stored water every six months.)

Food: Non-perishable foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking and little or no water (for example: canned goods, granola bars, peanut butter, etc.).

First Aid Kit: Basic first aid supplies, as well as prescription and non-prescription medications including vitamins, and eyeglasses.

Tools and Supplies: Paper plates, cups and utensils; battery operated radio; flashlight; extra batteries; wrenches; duct tape; whistle; utility knife; sanitation items such as toilet paper, soap, feminine supplies, garbage bags, bleach.

Clothing and Bedding: At least one change of clothing and footwear for each person, hats, gloves, rain gear, blankets or sleeping bags, thermal underwear.

Special Items: Important family documents (wills, insurance policies, deeds, stocks, bonds, passports, birth certificates, social security cards, immunization records, bank and credit card account numbers), entertainment (books, board games, cards) and pet supplies.



Helpful Hints: Disaster Supply Kit

- Your kit should sustain your family for 5-7 days.
- You will need one gallon of water per person per day.
- Don't forget your medications and prescriptions.



Disaster Response Questions and Answers:

What you need to know before disaster strikes!

Q: In the event of a major disaster in Alaska, would there be enough pharmaceuticals and medical supplies?

A: During an emergency, medical supplies may be depleted quickly. The Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) is designed to supplement and re-supply state and local public health agencies anywhere and at anytime within the U.S. or its territories. *(Read more on page 4)*

Q: If a major disaster strikes, should I stay home or go someplace like a local school or hospital?

A: Sometimes it may be safer to remain indoors and *shelter-in-place* than to evacuate an area. If sheltering-in-place is necessary, local emergency management or response officials will announce it to residents in the affected area. *(Read more on page 5)*

Q: How can I help my community prepare for emergencies?

A: The Municipality of Anchorage offers many opportunities for citizens to become involved in emergency preparedness. These programs and others can also be implemented in other communities around the state. *(Read more on page 5)*

Q: What if my kids are at school during a disaster?

A: Each public school in Alaska has a crisis response plan and a team to carry out the plan in the event of a crisis. School districts provide crisis response training annually to employees. *(Read more on page 6)*

Q: What impact does disaster have on children?

A: Children, whose image of themselves and the world is just forming, may be significantly disturbed by disaster. Adults should emphasize protection, guidance, and compassion. *(Read more on page 7)*

Q: Is Alaska prepared for possible chemical emergencies?

A: The Alaska Public Health Laboratory is prepared to detect and evaluate human exposures to hazardous chemicals, and provide technical assistance in the event of a release of a chemical agent such as cyanide, heavy metals, nerve agents or ricin toxin.. *(Read more on page 7 and 8)*

What would you eat or drink if...?

Flood, fire, national disaster, or the loss of power from high winds, snow, or ice could jeopardize the safety of your food or water. Knowing how to store food and water supplies will help you endure such an emergency.

Food Storage Tips Keep food in a dry, cool spot — a dark area if possible. Keep food covered at all times. Wrap cookies and crackers in plastic bags or airtight containers. Place sugar, dried fruits and nuts into airtight containers to protect them from pests. Inspect all food for signs of spoilage before use.

Always keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 40 °F and frozen food at or below 0 °F.

Have items on hand that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on an outdoor grill. Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply.

Water Storage Tips Store your water in thoroughly washed plastic, glass, fiberglass or

enamel-lined metal containers. Plastic containers, such as soft drink bottles, are best. Never use a container that has held toxic substances. Make sure your water container's seal is air tight, then label and store them in a cool, dark place. Rotate water every six months.



You can use the water in your hot-water tank, pipes and ice cubes. As a last resort, you can use water in the reservoir tank of your toilet (not the bowl).

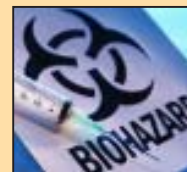
Treating Water In addition to having a bad odor and taste, contaminated water can contain microorganisms that cause diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and hepatitis. You should treat all

water of uncertain purity before using it for drinking, food preparation or hygiene. There are many ways to treat water.

Boiling: Boiling is the safest method of treating water. Bring water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes. Let the water cool before drinking.

Bioterrorism Preparedness

Bioterrorism is the use of viruses, bacteria, fungi, or toxins to produce death or disease for ideological, political, or financial gain.



"Alaska has a low risk of a bioterrorism attack, but there would be severe consequences if an event did occur," said Jim Mackin, Public Health Preparedness Program Manager for the DHSS, Division of Public Health.

"We are fortunate to have public health nurses working in every corner of Alaska and in cooperation with private health care providers, state epidemiologists, labs and the Tribal health system. These professionals work and train to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. With that experience and knowledge it makes sense that they are our first line of defense against potential biological weapons," he added.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the highest priority agents (causing smallpox, anthrax, plague, botulism, and tularemia) can pose an immediate risk because they are easily disseminated or transmitted; cause high mortality; may cause public panic; or require other special action. The lower priority agents (causing brucellosis, encephalitis, typhus fever, toxic syndromes, and others) are more likely to be future threats and are also considered in planning and preparedness efforts.



Alaska Emergency Medical Services *Neighbor Helping Neighbor*

Most people do not think about Emergency Medical Services (EMS) until they need to call 911. Then they expect and deserve to have well trained and equipped personnel respond rapidly with emergency medical care and transportation to a medical facility. Throughout Alaska, thousands of individuals are ready to respond to those calls.

More than 100 state-certified ground EMS organizations in Alaska provide advanced life support, including defibrillation and administration of medications. Additionally, several paramedic level systems provide care as sophisticated as that found in any part of the U.S. Trained and equipped EMS responders are in virtually every Alaska community and more than two-thirds of them are volunteers. Many EMS providers also provide other services, such as blood pressure screening, injury prevention education, and CPR and first aid classes.

The EMS system is an important component of public health preparedness in Alaska. Emergency Medical Technicians and Mobile Intensive Care Paramedics train with their public health partners, fire service, law enforcement, and emergency management, to prepare for health consequences of everyday emergencies, and natural or human caused disasters.

Keeping Alaskans safe, healthy, and prepared.

Homeland Security Begins at Home

The Alaska Homeland Security Threat Level Procedures developed by the Alaska Office of Homeland Security contain recommended actions for critical facilities, government agencies, and citizens during each level of threat as defined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. General recommendations for citizens for each threat level are listed below. (Recommendations from each lower level should also be followed at the higher levels.)

Green (Low): Be aware of what natural hazards are prevalent in your area and prepare a disaster supply kit and disaster plan. Consider taking a first aid or CPR course.

Blue (Guarded): Be alert for any suspicious activities and report it to authorities. Review your disaster plan;

ensure your family's immunizations are current; consider volunteering with community response organizations; and monitor news for terrorist alerts.



Yellow (Elevated): Join your Neighborhood Watch program and attend meetings of your Local Emergency Planning Committee. Network with family, neighbors and community for mutual support during an emergency. Store food, water, and emergency supplies.

Orange (High): Expect security delays while traveling and consider taking reasonable personal security precautions. Be alert to your surroundings; avoid placing yourself in a vulnerable situation and monitor your children's activities. Use television and radio to monitor the local, State and National situations and listen for instructions from local officials.

Red (Severe): (Normally, this threat condition is declared for a specific location or critical facility.) Do not travel into affected areas; avoid crowded public areas; and adhere to travel restrictions announced by authorities. Be prepared to shelter-in-place or evacuate on order of local authorities; assist neighbors who need help; and expect searches of purses and bags and restricted access to public buildings.

Alaska Tribal Health System:

Urban - Rural Connection

If a major disaster hit rural Alaska, chances are good that Alaska Tribal Health System professionals would take the lead in treating patients. Tribal



hospitals are the only inpatient emergency care resources for Alaska Natives and non-Natives in Barrow, Kotzebue, Nome, Bethel and Dillingham, and the vast regions surrounding them. Despite the isolation and great distances common to many areas of Alaska, the Tribal Health System is an invaluable resource for delivering care and saving lives in a disaster.

All hospitals maintain emergency plans and practice them through periodic exercises. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations inspects every hospital for key elements such as emergency plans, training and exercises. In most rural communities, Community Health Aides/Practitioners (CHAPs) in tribal clinics provide care including emergency care; all CHAPs are certified emergency medical technicians.

Many tribal clinics are connected to tribal hospitals through the Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network (AFHCAN) — a technology that virtually brings medical specialists into the clinic exam room. Also, in a major disaster, an air medical evacuation system provides a framework for expansion to transport large numbers of patients from any Alaska community to a major medical center within hours.

Strategic National Stockpile

Medical Supplies at the Ready...



A terrorism attack or natural disaster may require rapid access to large quantities of medicine and medical supplies. During an emergency, medical supplies may be depleted quickly.

Because few state or local governments have the resources to create large medical stockpiles on their own, the Federal government created the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). The SNS has pre-stocked caches of pharmaceuticals, antidotes, and medical supplies designed to provide rapid delivery in response to events when little or no information is known about the disease or cause of the event. The SNS will supplement and re-

supply state and local public health agencies anywhere and at anytime within the U.S. or its territories.

Once the supplies arrive in the state, public health officials have the responsibility of distributing them to the affected public.



Getting Involved: Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

You Are Part of the Team - Prepare, Volunteer

We live in a different world than we did before September 11, 2001. We are more aware of our vulnerabilities, more appreciative of our freedoms, and more understanding that we have a personal responsibility for the safety of our families, our neighbors and our nation. But we also know that we can take action now to help protect our families, help reduce the impact an emergency has on our lives, and help deal with the chaos if an incident does occur. The Municipality of Anchorage offers many opportunities for its citizens to become involved in community emergency preparedness. However, these programs and others can also be implemented in other communities around the state.

Anchorage Watchful, Alert and Ready for Emergencies (AWARE) Academy

is a free, two-hour disaster preparedness class designed to teach basic emergency response strategies. The lessons are designed for citizens with little or no background in emergency response. AWARE Academy graduates leave the class with an understanding of the types of local emergencies (both natural and man-made) that can occur, the importance of self-sufficiency, and specific recommendations for creating personal and family disaster plans.



AWARE with Care was created to address the needs of homebound and frail residents in emergency events. AWARE with Care volunteers mobilize as trained emergency preparedness and disaster response instructors to provide education, screening and supplies to this vulnerable population. Special training allows volunteers to view a challenged resident's living area for possible problems, give them an emergency kit, and help the citizen create a health card available for emergency care givers.

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units consist of locally based medical and health volunteers who can assist their communities during emergencies, such as an influenza epidemic, chemical spill, or terrorism attack. MRC volunteers also provide education and prevention services to improve the health and well being of their communities.



Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) help supplement and support officers and civilian personnel by allowing them to concentrate on their primary duties. Volunteer roles may include performing clerical tasks or serving as an extra set of "eyes and ears" in search and rescue activities.



Neighborhood Watch is a highly successful effort that provides a unique infrastructure to bring together local officials, law enforcement and citizens to protect our communities. In addition to serving a crime prevention role, Neighborhood Watch can also be used as the basis for bringing neighborhood residents together to focus on disaster preparedness as well as terrorism awareness.



Medical Examiner

The DHSS Office of the State Medical Examiner conducts the medical/legal investigative work of unanticipated, sudden or violent deaths. This includes



determining cause and manner of death, consulting with law enforcement and the courts, and providing information about non-lethal injuries to children specific to child abuse and neglect.

Alaska law requires the Medical Examiner to investigate the circumstances and determine cause and manner of death of all deaths that are sudden, when a person is in apparent good health; not under a physician's care; suspicious, unusual or unexplained; the result of violence; or due to criminal neglect.

"We also have a significant role in public health emergency preparedness and response by investigating deaths that present a hazard to citizens, as with emerging infections, agents of bioterrorism and mass fatalities," said acting State Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Franc Fallico.

Shelter-In-Place

During some kinds of chemical or hazardous materials emergencies, it may be safer to remain indoors and shelter-in-place than to evacuate an area. If sheltering-in-place is necessary, local emergency management or response officials will announce it to residents in the affected area. When a shelter-in-place announcement is given, listen closely and follow all instructions provided by the officials. Basic steps for sheltering-in-place include:

- ☒ Go inside. If there is time, lock all windows and exterior doors and close vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off all fans and heating systems.
- ☒ Go to an interior room above ground level and without windows (bring disaster supply kit).
- ☒ Tape plastic over any windows in the room. Use duct tape around windows, doors and cracks to make an unbroken seal.
- ☒ Listen to the radio or television for additional instructions or an "all clear" announcement.

The Role of Public Health...

Your first line of defense against the unseen hazards of modern life, from foodborne illnesses to bioterrorism.

The public health system in Alaska consists of multiple agencies, including the DHSS Division of Public Health; Municipality of Anchorage Department of Health and Human Services; Native Health System, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, hospitals, health care providers, and many others.

Public health services are primarily population-based and focused on achieving and preserving the health and well-being of communities and populations. Core services of the public health system include prevention and control of epidemics, infectious disease, injuries, chronic disease and

disability; assurance of access to preventive services and quality health care; and protection against environmental hazards that impact human health.

In preparation for and response to public health emergencies, disasters and terrorist attack, agencies work together to conduct disease surveillance and investigation and provide treatment consultation, policy recommendations, case management and laboratory testing.

Officials also monitor and assess the health status of Alaskans through collection and analysis of vital statistics, behavioral risk factor data, and disease and injury data, including forensic data from postmortem examinations. This data and other scientific information and expertise are used to develop policy and deliver disease control and health promotion services.

In addition, public health promotes healthy behaviors by educating the public, and supporting community action to reduce health risks. Outreach activities are conducted to link high-risk and disadvantaged people to needed services and to provide direct treatment and clinical preventive services to these populations.



Emergency Management

Preparedness and Partnerships are Key

The Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management has the task of coordinating the efforts of numerous state governmental agencies in a time of crisis.



"We're the ones the local governments call if they need help," said Jamie Littrell, the Division's Public Information Officer. "We

are the coordinator for State resources in a disaster, whether it's a natural or man-made one."

Several times a year, the Division works with the Department of Health and Social Services and other state agencies to test the emergency operations plans related to disasters and terrorist attacks. Scenarios in this training often include events that would cause a public health crisis. "Being prepared is one of the Division's top priorities."

For additional information on DHS&EM, log on to:
www.ak-prepared.com.

Our Schools, Our Kids

In Case of Crisis

Each public school in Alaska has a crisis response plan and a team to carry out the plan in the event of a crisis. The teams consist of the principal, a certified staff member, a classified staff member, a parent and perhaps others.



Each school's plan outlines a number of items, such as the name of the person in charge of the plan and of each crisis team member and their roles; and protocols for responding to the immediate physical harm of students, faculty or staff.

The plan also describes the school's response to disaster and emergency procedures such as earthquakes, fire, flood, explosions or other events where death or serious injury is likely.

School plans outline procedures for safe entrance to and exit from the school during a crisis, including evacuation and lock down. Also, the plans describe policies for enforcing school discipline and maintaining a safe and orderly environment during a crisis.

School districts provide crisis response training annually to employees, including conducting evacuation and lock down drills; and each school reviews its plan annually and updates it as appropriate.

Alaskans can find their school's crisis plan in their local school or school district central office.

Coping with Traumatic Events:

What matters most - before, during, and after a crisis

Disaster response is most often associated with the groups who provide immediate rescue and emergency services. Media coverage typically captures the recognizable uniforms of fire, police, American Red Cross, and emergency medical personnel. But there is a less noticed group of responders that address the emotional fallout from the shocking destruction and loss disasters leave in their wake. They are the professionals and para-professionals who provide the emotional and social counseling critical to personal restabilization and recovery.

Local Community Mental Health Centers, in cooperation with the State of Alaska, maintain Emergency Response



Plans (ERP) should a disaster befall their community. The DHSS Division of Behavioral Health, through its ERP, maintains a readiness to assist these centers should their resources become overwhelmed. Staff are trained in crisis counseling and emergency response. In a disaster they reach out to victims and their families to provide support, problem solving, and referral information.

The services are provided in shelters over a cup of coffee, or to a child amidst the ruins of a home, while parents search through their scattered belongings. They also provide Critical Incident Stress Management, specialized debriefing for rescuers who respond to the first calls for help. These are the people who respond to the invisible wounds – terror and confusion, anger and horror, grief and disorganization.

State-of-the-Art State Lab

The DHSS State Public Health Laboratory is *the* state-of-the-art facility for scientific monitoring, diagnosis, and assessment of the health, safety and security of the people of Alaska.



The Laboratory is the only Biological Safety Level 3+ certified lab in Alaska and has capacity to detect and identify biological, chemical and radiological threats. In fact, the State Public Health Laboratory is one of only 23 laboratories in the country capable of identifying smallpox, and one of 12 capable of identifying botulism. The Laboratory also has five unique, state-of-the-art mass spectrometers to detect even small amounts of any type of chemical.

“We take an all hazards approach,” said Dr. Bernd Jilly, Chief of the Section of Laboratories. “The dedicated chemists, microbiologists, physicists and toxicologists are an invaluable resource to deal with all hazards to Alaska’s health, be it natural, man-made, or intentional.”

Disaster’s Impact on Children

“No one who sees a disaster will be left untouched.”

The haunting reality of this truth is inescapable. Though framed by the same event, the picture for each person will be different. Populations like children, the elderly, the poor, and the handicapped may experience great difficulty recovering.

Children, whose image of themselves and the world is just forming, may be significantly disturbed by disaster. Preexisting problems, family history, socialization, and personality are factors that affect their reaction and recovery.



A child’s developmental level determines his or her ability to comprehend events and to develop coping skills. Children seek security and direction from parents. As a result, children’s trauma increases significantly when parents are also terrified and confused.

Children’s reactions to disaster are also age dependent. Preschoolers may display helplessness, crying, bed-wetting, nightmares, clinging, and anxiety. School age children may have physical complaints, safety fears, poor concentration, or preoccupation with the disaster. They may fight or withdraw from peers. Teens suffer these same symptoms along with sleep problems, depression or guilt, or increase risk-taking behavior, including use of alcohol.

Initial response for children should emphasize protection, guidance, and compassion. Children should be allowed to express their experience through discussion, art, and storytelling. Teens might be asked to perform practical tasks, especially in service to others. In the recovery stage, adults should promote new problem solving and coping skills for children and teens. All kids should be encouraged to develop friendships with peers and adults.

Keeping Alaskans safe, healthy, and prepared.

Chemical Preparedness

The DHSS Public Health Laboratory is coordinating with emergency responders, law enforcement, hospitals and other partners to prepare for an effective public health response to a chemical emergency.

The Laboratory is prepared to detect and evaluate human exposures to hazardous chemicals, and provide technical assistance in the event of an accidental or intentional release of a chemical agent such as cyanide, heavy metals, nerve agents or ricin toxin. The sophisticated analytical chemistry



capacity being developed in the DHSS Public Health Laboratory will serve several everyday public health needs

in Alaska beyond our need to respond to emergencies. For example, the laboratory can analyze levels of environmental contaminants in blood, urine or other tissues

from humans to test for unhealthy exposures.

The laboratory is also developing forensic toxicology capacity to provide analytical services to the Medical Examiner's office.

Epidemiology: Disease Detectives

Epidemiology is the study of the causes and transmission of disease within a population and plays a major role in bioterrorism preparedness. In Alaska, state and local epidemiology experts are responsible for surveillance, investigation and control of acute and chronic diseases and injuries, whether they are natural or man-made.

"We're disease detectives," said Dr. Beth Funk, medical epidemiologist for the DHSS Division of Public Health Section of Epidemiology. "Health care providers and laboratories are required to report certain diseases or suspicious disease trends to us. We are responsible for investigating the reports and assessing the public health risk of the situation," she added.

Infectious disease reporting in Alaska has resulted in the identification of many outbreaks. A rapid response is critical to prevent additional human illness and sometimes even death.

Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Information:

CDC Public Response Hotline

(888) 246-2675 English
(888) 246-2857 Espanol
(866) 874-2646 TTY
cdcresponse@ashstd.org
<http://www.cdc.gov>

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

(907) 465-3030
<http://health.hss.state.ak.us/>

Alaska Division of Public Health (DPH)

(907) 465-3090
<http://health.hss.state.ak.us/dph/>

DPH Public Health Preparedness Program

(907) 269-2042
<http://health.hss.state.ak.us/dph/DPHPP/>

Alaska Division of Behavioral Health

(800) 465-4828 Juneau
(800) 770-3930 Anchorage
<http://health.hss.state.ak.us/dbh/>

Alaska Division of Environmental Health

(907) 269-7644
<http://www.state.ak.us/dec/eh/>

Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

(800) 478-2337
(907) 428-7000 (in Anchorage)
<http://www.ak-prepared.com/>

Anchorage Department of Health and Human Services

(907) 343-6718
<http://www.muni.org/health1/index.cfm>

Anchorage General Emergency Information Hotline

(907) 343-1400

State Road Conditions

511
<http://511.alaska.gov/>

Poison Control Center

(800) 222-1222
<http://www.aapcc.org/>

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

(907) 729-1900
<http://www.anthc.org>

American Red Cross of Alaska

(907) 646-5400
<http://www.alaska.redcross.org/>

Anchorage Volunteer Programs:

Anchorage AWARE Program

(907) 343-4491
<http://www.muni.org/AWARE>

Anchorage Neighborhood Watch

(907) 786-8585

Anchorage Medical Reserve Corp (MRC)

(907) 343-4650

Volunteers In Police Service (VIPS)

<http://www.PoliceVolunteers.org>

You may download additional copies of this publication at <http://health.hss.state.ak.us/dph/DPHPP/> or at <http://www.muni.org/health1/index.cfm>

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